

DEALING WITH A LOSS

“Loss” comes in many forms. At one end of the spectrum comes loss of life or limb and at the other, maybe losing a special possession of yours. Other losses that we experience in life can lie all along the continuum between these two extremes. Regardless of where along the continuum your loss occurs...our responses to a loss can be similar to the most traumatic loss. The biggest differences between varying kinds of losses will be the emotional intensity and the length of time it takes to start feeling more “normal” again. We all have varying skills to deal with loss...some more than others.

DO MEN AND WOMEN GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY? It seems so. Generally, women are typically more emotionally expressive and men are more stoic. Generally, women seem to listen and respond to their emotions, while men...generally “fight it off” or “ignore it.” Generally, women seek more support and men tend to “go it alone”. It is important to realize that these are generalizations and do not strictly apply to all men or all women all of the time. We certainly see variations. All of us have degrees of stereotypical masculine and feminine elements. Suffice it to say, some people are quieter, while others are more expressive about their emotions. Some people are more solitary, while others seem to want more contact. It is truly a matter of finding the most comfortable way to express your loss, regardless of your gender. During the grieving recovery process, it is important to keep moving forward with the healthy values you have developed. It can sometimes seem easier to slip away from the constructive lifestyle you have begun and lose track of making good decisions (both genders). To return to “healthy”, you have to make healthy choices.

HOW COMMON IS IT FOR PAST LOSSES TO COME TO MIND WHEN A NEW LOSS OCCURS? This happens quite commonly. A new loss experience can bring to mind other times when we have experienced loss and subsequent grief. It can often even intensify past grief feelings, if they were not previously dealt with. It seems true that losses are difficult to resolve. Therefore, when a new loss occurs, one seems to often be dealing with the current and possibly the “unfinished business” of previous loss experiences at the same time.

CAN YOU “CONTROL” YOUR GRIEF? We think...probably not...at least in the beginning stages. Loss and grief just don’t seem to work that way. How you might feel will be as varied as the circumstances of a potential loss. But, you can take an active part in how your grief unfolds. You can be proactive in taking good care of yourself by monitoring how you eat, sleep, physically exercise, and staying involved with others. Be around people who seem to be a source of supportive energy and comfort, rather than those who drain you of energy and are really somewhat into their own thing. If you are the one most directly involved with the loss, you may end up being the one, who others actually utilize to “pace how they interact with you.” You can help them support you by simply maintaining your involvement with them...they’ll do the rest.

WHAT HELPS WITH THE GRIEVING PROCESS? Above all else, what seems to help the most is being able to talk with at least one person about your thoughts and feelings...the ups and downs, the sadness and maybe even fear, the memories, and your hopes. Some people will talk with a variety of people and that’s ok, too. Whatever your choice, it just seems to help when you share your thoughts and feelings with someone else. Loss also seems to provide us with opportunity for gains. These gains might include new perspectives or lessons about our self, others, our relationships with others, or about life. These are difficult ways to gain new perspectives or learn lessons, but loss is an inevitable part of life. Be patient with your healing process...it just takes time.